

ON SIR BALTHAZAR GERBIER'S "COUNSEL AND ADVICE TO ALL BUILDERS."

The small volume of which I am now about to give you some account, possesses very slender claims to literary merit—nor has it much intrinsic professional value; yet it has, I think, still, great claims on our attention, as being among the very earliest of our native literary productions exclusively on the subject of our art.

The earliest edition of Sir Balthazar's Counsel and Advice is 1663. The early date, therefore, of this book gives it a value,—and a stronger interest attaches to it in our eyes, as giving some insight into the practice of architecture at the period of our great master, Sir Christopher Wren. Sir Balthazar was born at Antwerp, in 1592, and was brought up as a miniature painter. He was knighted by Charles I., and was employed by him, in conjunction with Rubens, to negotiate a treaty with Spain; he also resided at Brussels in a diplomatic character. He was subsequently employed as an architect by Lord Craven.

I must not, however, conceal that his biographers give but a sorry account of him. He failed to secure the favour of the court, and was driven to adopt a variety of means of living. It is true he fell upon evil times. The death of Charles I. deprived him of hope at court. He migrated to Surinam, where he was persecuted by the Dutch; and although at the restoration of Charles II. he built triumphal arches in honour of the young monarch, he appears never to have attracted much of the royal favour. He died in 1667. Having said thus much of our author, and having, I trust, prepared you to expect very little of value or novelty in his work, I proceed to fulfil my engagement to give you some account of its contents.

Prefixed to the treatise are no less than forty-one dedications, which, in fact, occupy about half the duodecimo volume. Although seldom, I believe, carried to so ridiculous an extent as in this case, the practice of preluding every literary attempt by these rhetorical invocations, through which it was hoped to win the favour of the great, was one of the literary foibles of that age; but the following observation in Mr. Macaulay's recently published history gives us some clue to the origin of these somewhat fulsome appeals—"The fee paid," he says, "for the dedication of a book was often much larger than the sum which any publisher would give for the copyright. Books were therefore frequently printed merely that they might be dedicated."

The treatise commences by adverting to the author's previous work, which he describes as "a little manual concerning the 3 chief principles of magnificent building—viz., solidity, convenience, and ornament;" wherein he "notes the incongruities committed by many undertakers of buildings." He points to the Grecians and Romans as the best builders, and urges that man should not be subject to fancies nor "enslaved by weather-cock-like spirits, to make their buildings according unto things a la mode. He further condemns the incongruity committed by surveyors, who were minded to show that they were skilled in describing columns, corniches, and frontispieces, although, for the most part, placed as the wild Americans are wont to put their pendants at their nostrils."

The author then proceeds to treat more particularly of his advice to all builders. "Whoever," he says, "is disposed to build, ought, in the first place, to make choice of a skilful surveyor, from whose directions the several master workmen may receive instructions by way of draughts, models, and frames." I should here say that the author throughout uses the terms surveyor and architect as perfect synonyms; there is no indication whatever of that distinction which is now, in England at least, universally received. He then adverts to some of the requirements of architects, and especially dwells on the knowledge of perspective as essential; he teaches that the architect should consider the ground whereon the building is to be erected, and then govern himself as the ground will give him leave; or, as Pope has since more elegantly expressed

it, "consult the genius of the place." He must place the front of a country house towards the east, "by which means he may shelter his double lodging rooms from the north-west." I cannot say that this piece of instruction is very intelligible. We can hardly regard the north-west as the aspect most to be shunned. The author here adds, what he quaintly calls a *note bene* to builders—viz., he must cause all the back of his stonework (which stands within the brickwork), to be cut with a rebate 3 inches broader than the breadth of his jambs and cornish, which will hinder the rain from piercing into the inside of the wall, and through the meeting of the brick and stone. He deems it necessary to make a sort of apology for this advice, as implying that "surveyors and master workmen in this refined age which abounds in books, with the portractions of the out and inside of the best buildings, are to seek the first points of their apprenticeship; of whom I ask the reason why modern buildings are so exceedingly defective; and whether it is not because many of them have been but apprentices lately, and too soon become journeymen; and that surveyors (who either affect more the building to themselves a strong parse, or are blind to the faults which their workmen commit), like careless postillions, hasten with the packet mail to the post-office, be it never so ill-girted, whereby it oft falls in the midway."

The author then advises how to try the capacity of a surveyor. "The readiest way to try him," he says, "is to put him to draw a ground plot in the builder's presence; to make him describe the fittest place for a seat; the ordering of the rooms for summer or winter; to contrive well the staircases, doors, windows, and chimneys,—doors and windows so placed that they may not be inconvenient to the chimneys,—the bedstead place far from the doors and windows, and of a fit distance from chimneys."

He then adverts to the "ceilings of rooms," adapting their height to the size, character, and use of the room. A bedchamber of state may be 30 feet wide, 40 feet in length, and 16 or 18 feet high; whereas a closet, 10 feet square, adjacent thereto, if made of the same height, would be "preposterous, and like a barber's comb-case." The dimensions here set down for a state bedchamber seem somewhat extravagant; but it must be remembered that our author's advice is apparently addressed to royal or noble builders; and in the 17th century business was transacted, and morning visitors were received, usually in the bedchamber, a practice which, at the present day, has not fallen altogether into desuetude on the continent.

The author then proceeds to the subject of exterior architecture. He points out the necessity of cornices over doors and windows, to prevent rain from falling on them, which he illustrates in his usual quaint way, by comparing a "cornish" to "the broad brim of the good hat of a traveller in a rainy day."

"The good surveyor," he adds, "will order ornaments to the front of a palace according unto its situation: shun too much carved ornaments on the upright, whereas the southerly winds raise much dust;" also "shun those spectacle-like cant windows which are of glass on all sides, for it may be supposed that the inhabitants of such houses and rooms with cant windows (exposed to the north-west) may well imitate a merry Italian fisher, who in a winter, windy, rainy day, had been stripped to his skin, and having nothing left to cover him save his bare net, wherein he was wrapt, put his finger through one of the holes, asking of passengers what weather it was out of doors." It is here to be observed, that at the period when our author wrote, classical architecture, on its revival, was still struggling with the Gothic forms that had prevailed for so many centuries previously. These cant or bow windows were peculiarly characteristic of the Tudor and Elizabethan ages, and so firmly rooted were they in the domestic habits and usages of the time, that the revivers of classical architecture were driven to make many attempts to retain the old favourite form with a new dress; and down to the present day we seem to have remained true to the old spectacle-like cant window of our forefathers, which, whilst it is almost universal in England, can scarcely

be met with in modern architecture on the continent."

Sir Balthazar then proceeds to give us advice of not a very important nature on the subject of balconies, balustrades, and corniches. He says that the Grecian and Roman surveyors ever made the corniches and ornaments about the windows of the upper stories to be bigger than those on the lower; and illustrates his remark by a somewhat pedantic reference to Michaelangelo, Raphael d'Urbino, and Albert Durer. He then teaches us as to the proportions of doors and windows. The chambers of a palace, he says, should have the doors wide enough for two to pass at once, and the height to be double the width; all other chamber doors should be convenient for a man of complete stature to pass with his hat on. Windows must be higher than they are wide, because light comes from above, and the middle transome should be above 6 feet from the floor, otherwise the transome would be opposite a man's eye; "hindersome," as he says, "to the free discovery of the country." The leaning-height of a window should be 3½ foot, and not so low that wanton persons may sit on them and break the glass, or that they may show themselves in quippo to passengers. "A good surveyor," he says, "shuns the ordering of doors with stumbling-block thresholds, though our forefathers affected them, perchance to perpetuate the ancient custom of bridegrooms, who, when formerly at their return from church, did use to lift up their bride, and knock her head against that part of the door, for a remembrance that she was not to pass the threshold of their house without their leave."

Doors, he says, should be on a row, and close to the windows, that when the doors are opened they may serve for screens, and not to convey wind to the chimney.

The hearth of a chimney ought to be level with the floor; and chimney mantles ought to be of stone or marble. It is necessary to cover the top of chimneys to keep out rain and snow; the smoke holes can be very conveniently made on the sides of their heads. Had the knight lived in these times he would doubtless have been very severe, in his quaint way, upon the monstrous fashion of modern chimney-pots.

"Roomes on moist grounds do well to be paved with marble," and "a good surveyor shuns the making of timber partitions on the undermost story." "The good surveyor doth contrive the repartitions of his ground plot so as most of the necessary servants may be lodged in the first ground-story, whereby there will be less disturbance, less danger of fire, and all the family at hand on all occasions." "Finally, he ought from time to time to visit the work to see whether the building be performed according unto his directions and moulds." The author then proceeds to a chapter on clerks of works. "A clerke of the werks," he says, "must be versat in the prices of materials and the rates of all things belonging to a building; know where the best are to be had; provide them to the workmen's hands," and so on, adding that "though naile to some seem not very considerable, yet ought the clerke of the werke to be discrete in the distributing of them to some carpenters whose pockets partake much of the austrache's stomachs." "His eyes must wander about every workman's hands, as on those of the sawyers at their pit so that they waste no more than needs in elabs; on the laborers' hands in the digging of the foundation for the bricklayers, that all the loose earth may be removed and springs observed."

Some of the ordinary duties of a clerk of works are then enumerated; as, that he should prevent bricks being tumbled out of the cart; that he should suffer no sammel bricks to be made use of, and that he should not suffer the bricklayers to lay any foundation except the ground be first rammed, though it seem never so firm. "No great and small stuff," he says, "should be huddled together in the foundation, but all laid down as even as

* Lord Bacon, who wrote somewhat before the date of this book, had none of our author's prejudices against these cant windows. "I hold them," says he in his well known essay on building, "of good use, for they be pretty returning places for conference; and besides they keep both the wind and sun off, for that which would strike almost through the room doth scarce pass the window."